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The Bear

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Three Poems · *Pat Mangan*

THE HARNESS

All right mister she says all buckled
her good boy good dog in the doggie harness
she had made for him real leather
with the brass rivets see it goes around him
across his shoulders under the tummy
but not too tight because he is walking
just everywhere getting into things
and to which now she fastens a length of rope
and then to the clothesline All right mister
going for a walk and he loves it
gets right up under the fat clouds
the green trees everything's waiting
as she gives him a kiss a slight push
for direction down the line
the garage where the birds are nesting
and turns away and never looks back
never hears the rope hissing above his head
or the short squeals the ecstatic panting
all morning throwing himself into play

THE BEAR

Who would burn a bear with cigarettes
and yet they did over and over
at the city park under the cottonwoods
brown bear with much of its fur missing
next to the bandstand it didn't know to go
to the center of its cage it kept pacing
the way they do rubbing itself
against the bars shuffle turn
shuffle back the small flames I imagined

clinging to its fur were my own first matches
over the toilet bowl wooden soldiers
with their red caps first then black I loved
the flash and fizzle flushing them down
afterwards but no one heard the bear
maybe it didn't scream old anyway
missing its teeth and came to see
so they went right on when we heard the explosion
we were still eating Well my father said
they've shot the bear one hand on his water glass
the big fingers opening and closing
in the silence rays of dazzling light

DANDELIONS

Dandelions the first flowers I remember
and after the trap door leading to the cellar
where preserves were stored in blue-green jars
the worst on her back she had to bend over
to get under their roots calling them weeds
spooning viciously or with a kitchen knife
dig down she grunted like a pig
she ravished the lawn once she got started
dirt leaves stones everything flew out
I saw marbles I had thought lost unearthed
bits of colored glass crockery worms
once even a garter snake hacked up
then try to join itself I trailed along
begging her Slow down slow down your back momma
but she kept right on the loose skirts hiked
above her knees hair wild
her red face streaked with mud
not one of them remained when she was done
and sat weeping clutching her back
And what are you looking at she said can't I cry